DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 090 TM 008 484

AUTHOR Lave, Janice; Root, Darrell
TITLE The Lakota Needs Assessment: Purpose, Process and Outcomes.
PUB DATE 28 Mar 78
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (62nd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 27-31, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Surveys; Curriculum Evaluation; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Policy Formation; *Public Opinion; School Community Relationship; *School Districts; School Policy
IDENTIFIERS *Lakota School District OH; Ohio (West Chester)

ABSTRACT

This needs assessment attempted to identify the following: (1) strong curriculum programs; (2) critical needs in current programs; (3) areas in which new programs were needed; (4) which recommended new program areas had community financial support; (5) communication problems between the school district and the community; (6) attitudes toward existing school policies; (7) attitudes toward year-round schools; and (8) overall school district rating. Data analysis was based on five forms of a questionnaire developed for and returned by 574 students (grades 6-12), 270 parents, 254 teachers, 22 non-parent community members, 21 alumni, and 16 administrators. The needs assessment emphasized critical need areas in existing programs. Respondents were asked to rate program goals by level of importance and by actual accomplishments. Career education, social studies (citizenship), drug education, and reading were identified as critical need areas--having above average importance and below average achievement. A program was considered successful (low level need) if goal achievement ratings were high, regardless of the importance rating. The needs assessment influenced the development or improvement of curriculum programs, particularly in reading. Public awareness of the schools was found to have increased. It was recommended that future studies focus on more specific program areas. (CP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED169090

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The Lakota Needs Assessment: Purpose, Process and Outcomes

by

Janice Lave
Darrell Root

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Janice Lave

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Presented at the 1978 Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

Toronto, Canada

March 28, 1978

TM008 484

The purpose of this paper is three-fold: first, to identify how a school district can design a needs assessment to meet multiple needs; secondly, to describe the specific methodology which was used to collect, analyze, and report the findings; and thirdly, to enumerate the steps that were taken to transform the findings into policy decisions. This paper is based upon the Lakota Needs Assessment of 1976 (Lave) which was contracted with the Center for Vocational Education, the Ohio State University.

What Is a needs assessment?

Kaufman states that needs assessment is a process for determining the difference or discrepancy between "what is" and "what should be" occurring and for placing priorities among them. (1972) In broadest terms, a needs assessment measures the gaps between the actual status of a program and the desired or ideal status. These gaps or needs, when identified, can then be prioritized or ranked in order of importance. Needs assessments can then be used as a systematic management tool in both program planning and development.

While there are various models or approaches to follow when conducting a needs assessment, there are four essential components involved in the process. These four steps are:

1) Identify "program" goals or objectives that need to be assessed.

2) Determine procedure(s) for determining and measuring the present status of these goals and objectives.

3) Compare differences or discrepancies which exist between the desired goals (step 1) and the actual status of goals (step 2).

4) Assign priorities or rankings to the discrepancies or needs found in step 3.

Why was the needs assessment conducted?

The Lakota School District in West Chester, Ohio was experiencing an average growth of 300-400 students each school year. The District enrollment had expanded from 3000 students in 1967 to 6700 students in 1977. In addition, the School Board and Superintendent's office were continually receiving requests for program changes and additions from various special interest groups without knowing the extent of support for these changes. In order to change this neo-mobilistic decision setting, it was felt by the Superintendent's office and the School Board that a survey or needs assessment should be conducted to ascertain the feelings of the community toward present school policies and programs.

What types of information did the needs assessment provide to decision makers?

In this study, the district did obtain information to determine the extent to which program and student objectives were seen to be important and achieved. In addition, the scope of the study was expanded to include key concerns of school board members, administrators, teachers, curriculum specialists, school counselors and parents. The objectives of this needs assessment were to identify:

1) strong program areas;
2) critical need areas in current programs;
3) areas where new programs were needed;
4) new program areas which were deemed needed and had the fiscal support of the community;
5) communications problems within the district;
6) attitudes toward existing school policies;
7) attitudes toward year-round school; and
8) an overall district rating.

The original research proposal built several constraints into the design of the study. Namely the study was to consist of a survey which was to be administered to a sample of parents, teacners, students, former

students and community members (i.e., adults who do not have children attending the schools). Therefore, the evaluation could not consider other ways (i.e., interviews, achievement test scores, etc.) in the analysis. In order to get a feel for the scope of the district needs, current concerns and existing attitudes toward current school policies and programs, several group meetings were held by the evaluator with: 1) school board members, 2) all school administrators (principals and central administrators), 3) PTA members, student representatives, teachers and curriculum specialists. This latter group consisted of Lakota's "Curriculum Council" which worked closely with the Assistant Superintendent in planning and developing curriculum programs.

Taking all the suggestions about what this needs assessment should focus upon, which included both program needs and overall district policy concerns, a questionnaire was developed and later reviewed by a representative from the Office of the Superintendent, the Lakota Board of Education, school principals and the Curriculum Council. There was substantial agreement as to the content of the questionnaire.

After making minor revisions, five forms of a generic questionnaire were developed for:

1) parents
2) students
3) community members/non parents
4) former students
5) teachers and administrators (the school administration completed the same form as teachers; however, their responses were treated independently.)

Each questionnaire was organized in the following order:

--background information
--program goals
--student goals
--new programs
--school policies
--year round school
--overall ratings and comments

While most of the items were identical across forms, the background information questions were different for each group.

The items included for program and student goals were identical for each population. Thirty-three existing program goals and ten student goals were included. The student goals corresponded to those listed in the Lakota District Handbook. Respondents were asked to rate each of the goals on two scales: one for importance and the other for actual achievement or attainment of the goal. An example of the format used to respond to the two scales for each program goal has been shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Sample Question Format for Rating Program Goals

EACH STUDENT ATTENDING THE LAKOTA SCHOOLS SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO . . .

Importance						Achievement						
Low				High		Don't Know	Low				High	
1	2	3	4	5	Develop adequate skills in reading (reading speed and comprehension)	?	1	2	3	4	5	

In the next section of the questionnaire, "New Program Areas," parents, community members and teachers were asked to rate the importance of 14 new program areas which were being considered by the curriculum council, the board of education and district administrators. Since most of these new program areas would require additional funding, parents, community members and teachers (if they live in the district) were asked to rate whether they would support additional funding to meet the additional costs of each program, in addition to rating the importance of the programs. Students and former students also rated the importance of the 14 program areas. All

respondents were asked to list the three new program areas they felt were most important. Lastly, all groups were encouraged to, and did, suggest other program areas where they felt there was "great" need.

The "School Policies" section included items about communications, discipline policies, sex education, building organization, early graduation, and community use of school facilities. Items concerning communications were different on the various questionnaire forms and were related to each of the populations. These items are described in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
Types of Information Collected About Communication Policies

Do you feel the schools provide sufficient information to:	About:
Parents?	Curricular programs Individual student achievement Student grading system Parental organizations Discipline problems School board policy Transportation of students Funding and fiscal information School programs for community attendance College and scholarship information
Students/Former Students?	Individual student achievement Course offerings Career options Extracurricular activities Summer or part-time jobs College and scholarship information
Community/Non-parents?	Curricular programs School board policy Funding and fiscal information School programs for community attendance
Teachers?	School board policies Administrative changes Staff development programs Teacher re-certification procedures Handling grievances School budget

The last two sections of the questionnaire were identical for all populations. One section solicited feedback on current attitudes toward implementing a year-round school program. The questionnaire ended by giving respondents a chance to give the district an overall district rating and general comments. Respondents were asked to rate the Lakota School District educational programs in comparison to other school districts. Finally, all respondents were encouraged to write any comments, concerns, suggestions or recommendations for the Lakota schools.

How was the needs assessment administered?

Sampling Plan

In Figure 3, a description of the persons who were included in the sample for each population, and the specific sampling procedures used, are listed. Of the six respondent groups surveyed, it was difficult to identify and locate members of two groups: non-parents and former students. To verify that community members included were not also parents of the Lakota schools, a "check question" was included. The results showed that 27% of the reported "non-parents" indicated they had children attending the Lakota schools. This contamination within the group and the small sample size caused the evaluator to disregard the responses of this group. In addition, it was difficult to locate current addresses for former students. Because of the small number of students included in the sample and their low overall response rate, this group's responses were basically disregarded.

FIGURE 3

Description of Respondent Groups and Sampling Procedures

Respondent Group	Population Description	Sampling Procedures
Parents	All parents who had children enrolled in grades K-12, 1975-76 school year.	Three parents were randomly selected from each intact classroom/homeroom K-12 (N=572).
Non-parents	Community members who did not have children attending Lakota schools, 1975-76 school year.	Identified by telephone interviews within randomly selected streets from stratified geographic areas within Union and Liberty townships (N=92).
Students	All students from 6-12 grade attending Lakota schools 1976-77.	Homerooms were randomly selected by grade and school (N=574).
Former students	All students who graduated from Lakota high school from 1973-75.	Every 10th student was systematically selected from each class roster. Current addresses were identified by telephone interviews (N=73).
Teachers	All teachers under contract during 1976-77 with class assignments.	All teachers were included (N=254).
Administrators	All school board members, administrative personnel from superintendent's office, principals and assistant principals.	All administrators were included (N=16).

Survey Administration

Students and teachers were given time to complete the surveys at each respective school during the school day. All other surveys were

mailed to parents, community members (non-parents) and former students. Each survey form contained a cover letter which listed the purpose of the survey and insured the confidentiality of the respondents. Because of time and cost constraints, only a follow-up letter was mailed to non-respondents, approximately three weeks after the initial mailing.

Of the 557 questionnaires mailed to parents, 52% of the surveys were returned. Of the six district schools, the response rate was as high as 82% in one of three elementary schools to 31% for the other two elementary schools. The return rate from parents of high school students was 58%. In Table 1, the total number of respondents by group who were in the analysis is included.

TABLE 1

Number of Respondents by Group

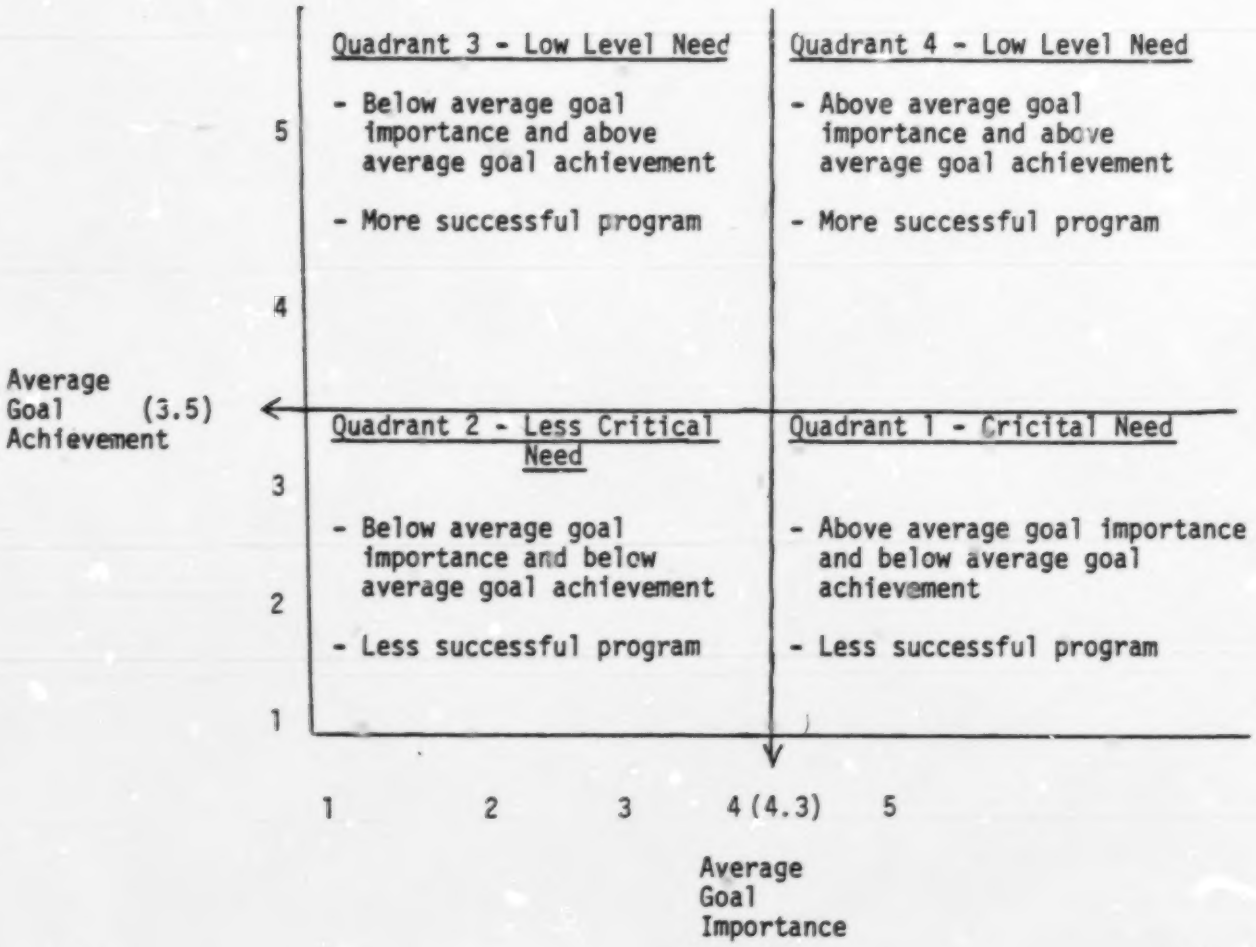
Group	Number
Students	574
Parents	270
Teachers	254
Non-parents	22
Former students	21
Administrators	16
Total	1157

Data Analysis

The mean ratings by groups responding and total were computed for the 33 program goals and 10 student objectives. The mean total importance and achievement scores of the 33 program goals were used to form four quadrants, each identifying one of the four levels of program need (Hershkowitz, 1973). The four quadrants (as shown in Figure 4) consisted of: Quadrant 1 - Critical Need, above average goal importance and below average goal achievement; Quadrant 2 - Less Critical Need, below average

FIGURE 4

Quadrant Method for Determining Need Areas


Quadrant 3 - Low Level Need
- Below average goal importance and above average goal achievement
- More successful program
Quadrant 4 - Low Level Need
- Above average goal importance and above average goal achievement
- More successful program
Average Goal Achievement (3.5)
Quadrant 2 - Less Critical Need
- Below average goal importance and below average goal achievement
- Less successful program
Quadrant 1 - Cricital Need
- Above average goal importance and below average goal achievement
- Less successful program
5
4
3
2
1
1
2
3
4 (4.3)
5
Average Goal Importance

goal importance and below average goal achievement; Quadrant 3 - Low Level Need, below average goal importance and above average goal achievement; and Quadrant 4 - Low Level Need, above average goal importance and above average goal achievement. It should be stressed that the criterion which determined a more successful program goa from a less successful program goal is whether its achievement was perceived

to be below or above the achievement level of the "average" program goal. Description statistics (i.e., N and %) were used to analyze the attitudinal items.

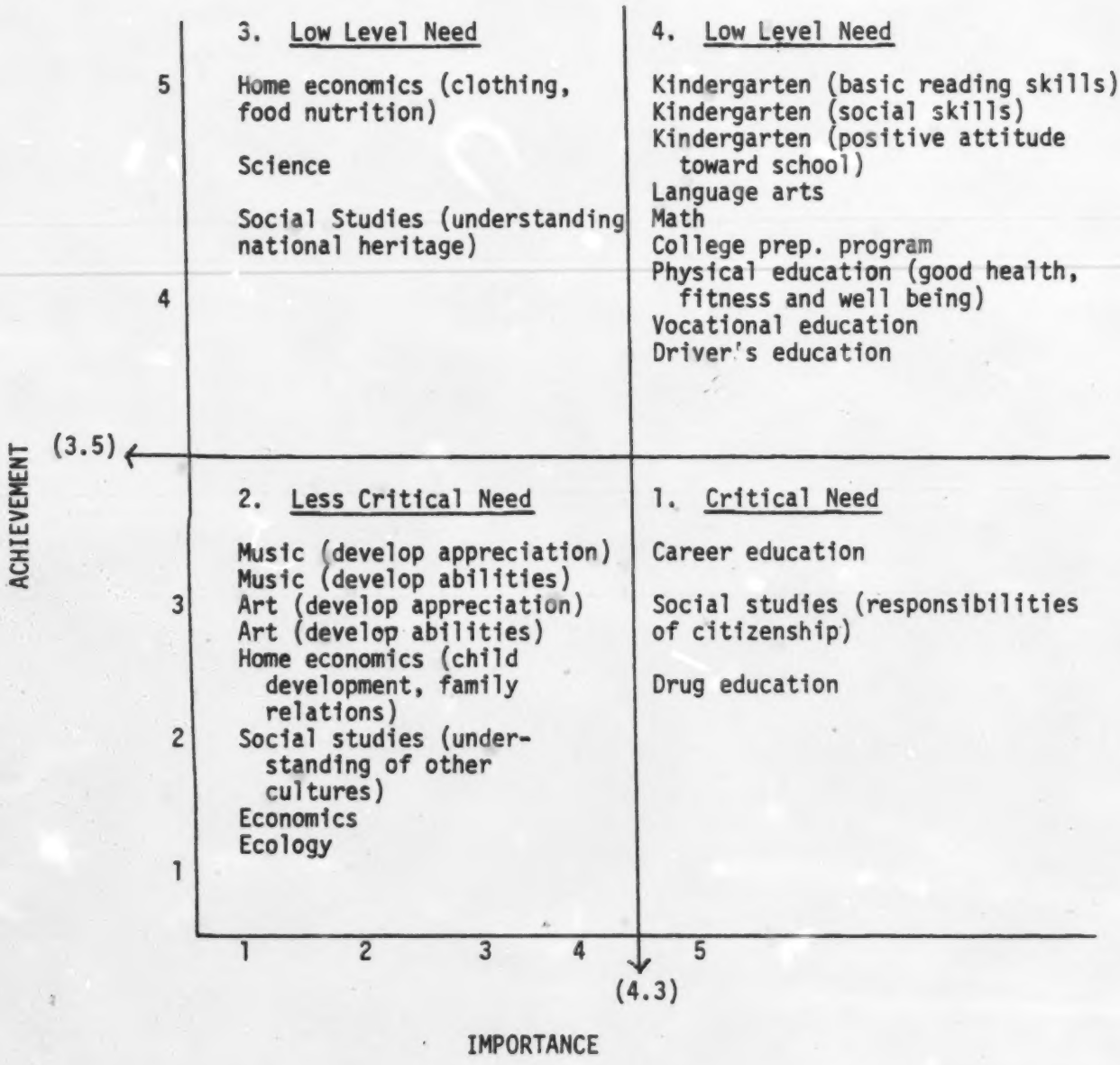
Results of Program Goals

In this section, the ratings of the 33 program goals will be examined. Not for the purpose of showing how one district's goals were rated, but to present a way of showing discrepancies between the importance and achievement of goal statements. As shown in Figure 4, the overall mean importance rating was 4.3, and the overall achievement rating was 3.5. In Figure 5 it can be seen that 23 of the 33 program goals clearly fell into one of the four quadrants. A listing of the program goals by quadrant is presented below:

Quadrant 1: Critical Need Areas Low Achievement, High Importance	
Career Education	Each student should obtain knowledge of various occupations and relate it to individual interests and abilities.
Social Studies	Each student should become aware of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship.
Drug Education	Each student should become aware of drug problems and proper drug usage.

FIGURE 5

Program Goals Primary Needs Matrix of Defined Areas of Need



Quadrant 2: Less Critical Need
Low importance, low achievement

Music	Each student should develop an appreciation of music. Each student should develop individual abilities and talents in music.
Art	Each student should develop an appreciation of a variety of art forms, such as paintings and sculpture. Each student should develop individual abilities and talents in art.
Home Economics	Each student should learn about child development, personal and family relationships.
Social Studies	Each student should develop an understanding of other cultures and peoples.
Economics	Each student should develop an understanding of our national economic system and principles.
	Each student should understand the need for wise planning and conservation of resources.

Quadrant 3: Successful Program Goals - Low Level Need
Low importance, high achievement

Science	Each student should understand and apply basic science concepts.
Social Studies	Each student should develop an understanding of our nation's heritage.
Home Economics	Each student should learn about clothing, food and nutrition.

Quadrant 4: Successful Program Goals - Low Level Need
High importance, high achievement

Kindergarten	Each kindergarten student should develop a positive attitude toward school and learning.
	Each kindergarten student should develop social skills including working well with others, getting along with classmates.
	Each kindergarten student should prepare for the first grade by learning basic reading and math readiness skills.
Language Arts	Each student should develop skills to communicate effectively through writing, speaking and listening.
Math Program	Each student should understand and use mathematical processes and concepts.
Physical Education Program	Each student should develop an understanding of good physical health, fitness and well being.
College Prep Program	Each high school student should have the opportunity to obtain preparation for college academics.
Vocational Program	Each high school student should have the opportunity to obtain skilled technical training at Lakota High and Butler County Joint Vocational School.
Driver's Edcuation	Each high school student should have the opportunity to obtain instruction in motor vehicle laws, driving principles and procedures.

In addition to the 23 program goals shown in Figure 5, there are ten remaining program goals that did not discretely fit into one of the quadrants. These program goals are borderline cases where degree of need is less well defined.

Four program goals have been rated as having high achievement, but an average importance, therefore, they would borderline quadrants 3 and 4. Regardless of their rating in importance, they are still seen as successful program goals. These four program goals are listed below.

Quadrants 3/4: Successful Goals
High achievement, average importance

Speech Therapy	Each student should develop habits of correct individual speech.
Health Education	Each student should learn how to establish sound personal health habits.
Business Program	Each high school student should have the opportunity to obtain training in business and clerical skills.
Physical Education Program	Each student should develop physical skills and coordination

The program goal, foreign language, received a rating of average achievement (3.5), but was rated low in importance. Because of this, it was considered a low level need. It borderlined quadrants 2 and 3.

Quadrants 2/3: Low Level Need
Average achievement, low importance

Foreign Language	Each high school student should have the opportunity to develop skills in speaking, writing, and reading in a language other than English.

Another program goal, reading, received an average rating in achievement, but was rated as having high importance. Since reading is considered critical to success in our society, then it was decided that it should be expected to be one of the more successful programs in our schools. Because of this, reading was classified as a critical need area.

Quadrants 1/4: Borderline Critical Need High importance, average achievement	
Reading	Each student should develop adequate skills in reading (reading speed and comprehension).

Three program goals were rated as having low achievement, but average importance. Similar to reading, these three goals would be considered borderline critical need areas.

Quadrants 1/2: Borderline Critical Need Average importance, low achievement	
Home Economics	Each student should learn how to be a wise consumer when paying for services and purchasing products.
Counseling Services	Each student should obtain vocational or career counseling.
Counseling Services	Each student should obtain counseling concerning personal problems.

One program goal, sex education, was classified in a group by itself. It was rated as having both average achievement and average importance.

Quadrants 1/2/3/4:	Average importance, average achievement
Sex education	Each student should understand the process of human reproduction.

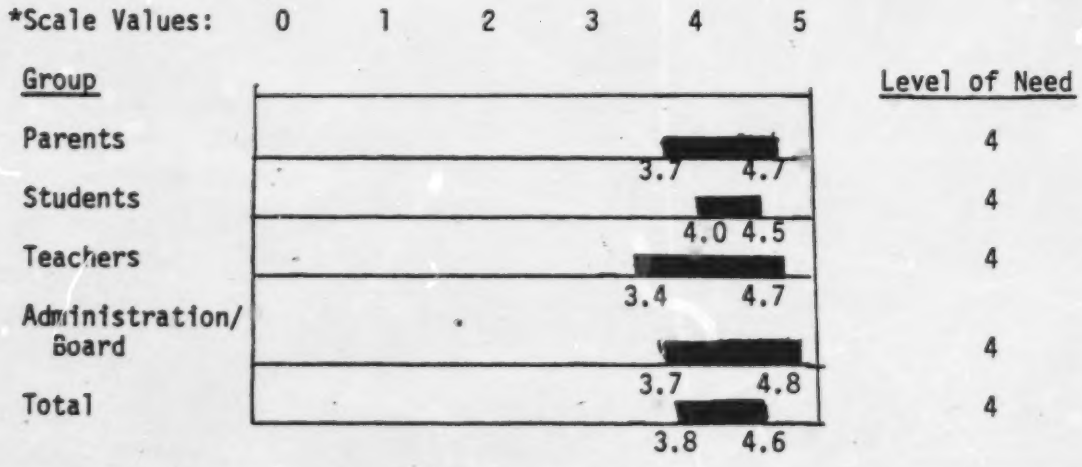
It should be noted that the results presented for determining level of need are based upon the responses of all groups combined. While there was some variation by group for some of the program goals, it was felt that the level of need, as defined by the total population for the program goals, accurately reflects the feelings of most respondents. As shown in Figure 6, specific group data, by program goal, was also reported to the districts. The format used is similar to that employed by "The School-Community Climate Survey" developed at Battelle Institute.

FIGURE 6

Sample Format for Reporting Discrepancy Scores

Math Program

Goal: Each student should understand and use mathematical processes and concepts:



*On each bar, the left-end point represents the achievement, while the right-end point represents the importance scale. The "level of need" corresponds to the four quadrants discussed earlier.

Summary of Other Major Findings

Because there was relatively no difference in the ratings given to each of the ten student goals, the quadrant method was inappropriate to use to present the findings.

Nine new program areas were rated as having high level of need. These new program areas are in order of greatest need first:

Reading specialists, grades 4-8
Evening adult education courses in academic subjects
Special programs for gifted
Swimming pool and swimming program for community
Evening adult education courses in hobbies and crafts
Career exploration program in middle schools
Art program for elementary schools
Counseling program in elementary schools
Conversational foreign language program in middle schools

Of those programs listed above, the two adult education evening courses did not require additional funding; however, the remaining seven programs required new funding. Those program areas that a majority of respondents indicated they would support with additional funding included: add reading specialists for grades 4-8, develop a counseling program in elementary schools, develop special programs for the gifted, and to build a district-wide swimming pool.

Three of the new programs identified as having high need corresponded with three program areas which were identified as having critical or borderline critical need. These three program areas were reading, career education, and counseling services.

Concerning current school policies, all response groups strongly supported: 1) mandatory expulsion of students who buy, sell or use an illegal drug; 2) continuing community use of school facilities; and 3) continuing the present system of organizing school building by grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Concerning communication between parents and the school district, parents felt sufficient information was provided to them concerning: student grading system, transportation of students, parental organizations, individual student achievement and school programs for community attendance. Areas where the district could improve communications included: college and scholarship information, school board policy, discipline problems, and funding and fiscal information.

Students felt sufficient information was provided to them about course offerings and extracurricular activities. But they felt more information could be provided about summer and part time jobs, career options, and college and scholarship information.

Teachers felt sufficient information was provided concerning administrative discipline policies for students. But they felt information was lacking concerning the school budget and school board policies. Teachers also appeared to be uncertain as to whether they were receiving sufficient information concerning grievance handling and staff development programs.

Concerning the 12-month school program, most respondents (56%) had unfavorable feelings toward year-round school. Only 35% of the respondents were willing to support a study to look into the options and cost of operating a year-round school.

How were these findings used?

Extensive and creative approaches were used to disseminate the findings. The findings were presented to parent, teacher, and community groups. A newspaper column, "The Lakota Outlook," published weekly in the Liberty-Union Journal, discussed the major findings and questions raised by the study. The Superintendent's Office put out public relations

requests which encouraged organizations to invite the administration to discuss the study with their groups. The administration received requests from approximately 25 groups in the community.

Implementing new programs, improving less successful program areas, and formulating new policy related to the findings of the study is still an ongoing process. Since "reading" was defined as a critical need area, much attention has been paid to improving reading instruction. For example, changes made in the district's reading program have included the establishment of a Right to Read program, the addition of clinical reading centers in each school and reading teachers or students in grades 4 through 8. In addition, the district held a teacher in-service program on how to teach reading.

The results of the study also showed that there was some need for an elementary art program. Currently, each elementary school has added to its staff an elementary art teacher. Two new school buildings are under construction, an elementary and middle school. Based upon the study, the buildings will be organized by grades K-5 and 6-8. Other changes have been made concerning communications in the district between teachers, students, and parents. The district is also planning a program for gifted students and looking into the possibility of conducting another needs assessment in 1978.

This June, the voters in the Lakota district will have a chance to vote for or against an additional operating levy. The needs assessment study showed that those surveyed would be willing to support an additional levy in order to gain specific program areas which included a district-wide swimming program. While this survey was administered 1½ years ago, its impact is still felt throughout the district. The Lakota Needs Assess-

ment provides a positive example of how evaluation, namely needs assessment, can successfully meet the needs of school administrators in helping make policy decisions with the support of their constituency.

One Step Further

Having had some time to reflect on this study, there are several changes which should be considered before conducting future studies similar to this one. These changes would include developing and using a plotting program which would graph the goals in quadrants. In addition, the analysis by quadrants should be completed for each response group as well as the total population. It would also be more useful if separate surveys were developed for elementary program needs and secondary program needs, and if separate studies which focus on reflections of former students were conducted. The scope of this study within the time and cost constraints was too broad to allow for an in-depth look at specific program areas. Because of this, it is felt that it would be more valuable if future studies would focus on more specific program areas.

References

Hershkowitz, M. A Regional ETV Network: Community Needs and System Structure. Technical Report No. 791. Prepared for Regional Education Service Agency of Appalachian Maryland. Silver Spring, Maryland: Operations Research, Inc. Oct. 1973.

Kaufman, Roger A. Educational System Planning, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972, p. 33.

Lave, Janice. Lakota Needs Assessment Survey, Final Report. Lakota School District, West Chester, Ohio, 1976.

Needs Assessment Guidelines. Ohio Department of Education, Division of Planning and Evaluation, Spring 1973.

Witkin, Belle Ruth, An Analysis of Needs Assessment Techniques for Educational Planning at State, Intermediate and District Levels. Alameda County, Hayward, California, May 1975.